



NANCY J. LOEWENSTEIN

It Went Up Like Tinder!

by Nancy J. Loewenstein and Stephen F. Enloe, Auburn University

Having frequently heard how hot cogongrass burns, it was with some trepidation that we set out to burn two cogongrass-infested longleaf pine stands. The stands, research sites for a study investigating the impact of cogongrass and its management on the insect communities in pine forests, are located in Mobile and Baldwin counties in Alabama. Although we only needed to burn about one acre (half of our plots) we hired a consultant (Perry Malone Forestry, Inc.) to conduct the burn — because we only wanted to burn one acre! You definitely don't want to burn pine stands infested with thick, waist-high cogongrass unless you truly know what you're doing. Even with rainfall of more than one inch just two days before the burn, it went up like tinder! Flame heights often reached over 10 feet! Something else that was reinforced while observing this prescribed fire was how many cogongrass rhizomes are exposed and potentially spread when a fire line is put in.

Once the cogongrass grows back to about 12 inches in height, we will spray burned and unburned plots with glyphosate.

Soil-active imazapyr will not be used since it can damage longleaf pine and because a portion of the plots will be over-planted with a mixture of native plants. Insect diversity will be monitored on a biweekly basis. One group of insects that we are particularly interested in are root-feeding beetles that vector fungi associated with pine decline.

This research is part of a larger project also investigating possible links between cogongrass and susceptibility of pines to pine decline, and was recently awarded a \$494,000 grant from the U.S.D.A. Institute of Food and Agriculture. In addition to the authors, the Auburn University research team includes David Held (entomologist) and Lori Eckhardt

(forest pathologist and entomologist).



Cogongrass rhizomes exposed from fire line.

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